“Awe Came Over Them”
Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

Acts: 2:43-44
Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common;

There’s a word that appears in Scripture quite frequently, and that’s the word “awe.” You might have caught in the story we heard last Sunday from Mark’s Gospel about the travelers in the boat. Remember, this is the story John August Swanson portrays in his beautiful piece we are using as the theme for our Stewardship Campaign this year.

The travelers in the boat are understandably afraid as a storm rages around them. Together, they are rowing like mad to get to a place of refuge and safety. Jesus addresses the wind and the sea. Actually, the text says that he “rebuked the wind” and “said to the sea: Peace! Be still.” The wind ceased and there was a dead calm. Then Jesus turned to the people in the boat and asked: “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”

Mark reports that they were then “filled with great awe and said to one another: who then is this that even the wind and sea obey him?”

They were filled with great awe when they saw what the power of God can do.

When do we find ourselves filled with great awe?

It’s kind of interesting how the response of “Awesome!” has made its way into our conversations, isn’t it? All kinds of things can be awesome…a delicious chocolate chip cookie…awesome! The news of a coming birth. Awesome! The hummingbird flitting about in the tree outside our front window. Awesome! The gorgeous harp music in today’s worship service. Awesome! Progress on potential vaccines for the coronavirus. Awesome!

My sense is that when we utter that word, even about seemingly trivial things, we’re touched, just for a moment, with a sense of something so wondrous, so beautiful, so special…something ordinary words just can’t quite convey.

When the travelers in the boat experienced first-hand the power of God in the person of Jesus, it was truly awesome! They were filled with awe.

And did you hear that word again in the Scripture we heard David read this morning from the Book of Acts? In this description of the earliest Christians, we hear: “Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common.”

There’s a lot packed into those two brief sentences, and it’s all awesome! “Awe came upon everyone…” Why? “Because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” Not by Jesus this time. By the apostles themselves. By the travelers in the boat who’ve arrived ashore. The apostles and the travelers in the boat have all become agents of God’s power.

There’s a place in Luke’s Gospel where this transfer of power takes place. Jesus calls the then twelve disciples together and, Luke says, gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases and he sent them
out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal…and they departed and went out through the villages, bringing the good news…

The awesome power of God, as seen and experienced in Christ Jesus on the boat, now becomes operative through the lives and actions and words of the travelers on the boat, the apostles, and all disciples. This is truly awesome!

Our short verses from the Book of Acts proceed to spell out the effect this is having, in them and in those around them: “many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common.”

All who believed were together, just as they had been on that boat. AND they had all things in common.

You know, they’d really first experienced that while they were together on the boat. Remember how John Swanson describes it: “Disregarding age, gender, ethnicity, and status, all of them support each other, as together they struggle and row to safety through the perilous storm of life.” On the boat, they had all things in common. They had fear in common. They had courage in common. They grew into faith in common. And now, as Pope Francis puts it: “We have realized that we are all on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together…”

When we realize that we are all in this together...as we begin to draw strength from one another, and share what we have with one another...share our fragility and our strength, share our resources and material goods, share our love and dreams for the future...when we share all things in common we become a force of love in this world that witnesses to that awesome power of God. And others will come to know for themselves, and believe, and together we will be filled with awe.

Later this afternoon, at 1 p.m., we will have our (and I pray LAST) ZOOM Charge Conference. You’re all welcome to join in. Because even though we will very much miss sitting around tables and talking and sharing Nick’s delicious lunch, we will “see” one another’s faces. We will hear the stories of our ministry and mission that we have shared in common this year. We will celebrate the many, many ways that we continue to “Be the Hope” for one another in these crazy times, for our families, our community, and indeed in communities around the world. We will give thanks for all that we have accomplished TOGETHER this past year by the grace and power of our awesome God.

And I trust, that if we come with open hearts and eager spirits, we, too, will be filled with awe at the wondrous things the power of God is doing working through us. The awe of God’s life-restoring power. We will celebrate the awesome nature of God that flows into our hearts in an inpouring of strength, peace, security, and joy.

May we continuing rowing together through stormy seas, confident that God is in the boat, too, working in and through us, as we hold all things in common, we will find it to be truly awesome!

Thanks be to God!

Amen.